

Hornets in the Middle East

✖ When I was about 10 years old, I fell into a hornets' nest.

The hornets got caught in my clothing. The more I fought, the more they stung me. Later I counted about 20 stings. It was a painful few days, but I survived. Every now and then, I see someone caught up in a flurry of painful but meaningless activity. I am reminded of my childhood experience and often use the age-old expression, "They fell into a hornets' nest." Most Americans agree that President Obama fell into a Middle Eastern hornets' nest during the last few months. Despite the toppling of totalitarian states and the possibility of the establishment of new democracy, it is difficult to see a realistic end to the terrorism, bloodshed, and warfare in this important region of the world.

The death of Osama Bin Laden marked a symbolic end to America's war on terrorism. National jubilation is the only way to describe our corporate feeling about the demise of this "arch enemy" of everything Americans stand for. Perhaps this euphoric victory led the administration's foreign policy strategists into a subtle state of hubris. This false feeling of power may have convinced them that they could actually advance the peace process by imposing the US will on the Palestinian/Israeli peace process.

The entire nation is aware that on Thursday May 19, the president declared Middle Eastern peace talks could only progress if Israel would agree to return to their 1967 boundaries. After a veritable maelstrom of rebuttals, the president's international policy team realized the error of their ways. Therefore, the next Sunday morning (5-22-11) the president retracted his peace talk ultimatum. He even went so far as to claim that he was misquoted. His clarification speech occurred at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's (AIPAC) annual meeting in Washington, DC. Despite the public acquiescence of former Prime Minister Netanyahu,

the president seemed to create even more controversy. As I walked through the more than 11,000 pro-Israel advocates, I heard everything from motherly articulation of forgiveness to numerous people declaring they would never vote for President Obama again.

The most adamant individuals repeated a familiar chorus, "You don't just throw your friends under the bus!" Even the most casual observer of the Middle Eastern geo-political scene understands Israel will soon be surrounded by an even more hostile set of neighbors than they have been in the past. The majority of the citizens of bordering nations have never acknowledged Israel's right to exist. Some nearby nations are so adamant about the illegitimacy of Israel the maps used in their schools do not even depict or acknowledge Israel in any way. Their myopic view is that the Jews can simply go back to "wherever they came from."

This is a significant issue. No one can negotiate with someone who simply wants to annihilate you. Yes, they will take any concessions that you are willing to give them, while laughing at you behind your back. Surely the administration is smart enough to know this. Therefore, any public relations presentation that the Israelis are being intractable and refuse to negotiate in good faith is a myth even the most naive Washington staffer should reject thoroughly. The reality is that the true Palestinian citizens are often being used as pawns in an evil chess match for regional dominance. I am personally concerned our nation is starting to look like prideful "users" who break promises and betray their friends. I am convinced the US must somehow maintain a sense of commitment to our lifetime partners. We must avoid the appearance of a nation appeasing the anger of newly found friends at the expense of valued, long-term relationships.

Many US citizens forget we cannot separate Israel from its ethnic identity. In other words, some nations hate Israel for the most irrational reasons. Further, holocaust deniers and

anti-Semites abound in the region. We must not become an indirect instrument of hatred and bigotry.

Ironically, as long ago as the 19th century, anti-Semitism in Europe expressed itself in murder, persecution, and massacres. Against this historic backdrop, Zionists like Theodor Herzl led the way in encouraging both religious and secular Jews to consider a Jewish state. Hitler's assault on Jews was a manifestation of the worst nightmare Zionists had feared for a nearly a century. The 1948 establishment of the modern Jewish state was necessary for the survival of Jews from many nations. Importantly, the US was one of the earliest partners of this new country. An essential aspect of the nation's "raison d'être" is to serve as a safe haven for Jewish refugees from around the world. Nonetheless, the nation has not become an oppressive theocracy that imposes a state religion on its citizens. In fact, nearly 50 percent of Israeli citizens are not religiously observant Jews.

In the shifting sands of Middle Eastern politics, the predictability of our relationship with Israel should be protected. For example, on Memorial Day morning, international news agencies reported 20 protesters in Yemen were shot by their own government. Just this past March, hundreds of thousands rallied all across the nation in opposition to the government of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. At that time, the Yemeni president accused his closest standing ally, the US, and Israel of instigating the protests against him. Although his blame shifting gambit failed to gain him popular support, US intelligence discovered one of Saleh's internal allies (Sheik Abdul-Majid al-Zindani) actually did betray him. He encouraged tens of thousands of demonstrators in the capital of Sanaa to overthrow his government.

Against this backdrop of international intrigue, America needs to do what the old western adage says, "You've gotta dance with the one who brought you." This means, if necessary, we must stand back to back with Israel against all opposition.

Changing partners at this dangerous juncture could result in empowering a generation of rogue nations. Therefore, we must let our congressmen and senators hear these concerns.